

# Interracial News Service

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## APPROACHES TO RESIDENTIAL DESEGREGATION

Today, in our society, the struggle for basic human rights may well be the testing ground which will determine whether organized Christianity is a vital, dynamic and relevant force capable of providing a moral leadership which will aid in restructuring a society. The Sit-in movement, Freedom Rides, court decisions, resistance, violence and advance are parts of the pattern of a basic restructuring of relationships between whites and non-whites which is in process. The old order of superior-inferior and of separate-but-equal are no longer live alternatives acceptable to non-whites as well as many whites. However, attitudes, customs and habits held by many persons resist adjustment to this new fact of our common life. So the movement toward a new order of equality of opportunity — of the recognition of the personhood of every individual — takes place with pain, suffering, resistance which sometimes explodes into violence.

In response to this human situation, almost every major Protestant and Orthodox communion has committed itself in principle to "a non-segregated church and a non-segregated community." The major differences in opinion in the area of racial and cultural relations arise primarily around the questions of when, how and where. To put it another way, conflict and controversy develop only when Christian concern is translated into specific action. Yet, isn't it exactly here that the church must encounter the world? Isn't it here that evangelism and social action unite in proclaiming the Christian witness of God's reconciling love to the world?

Albert Camus, in speaking of what the unbeliever expects of the Christian, has written, "... what the unbeliever expects of Christians is that Christians should speak loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt could arise in the heart of the simplest man." He seems to be saying that the communication of the Christian witness cannot be divorced from Christian action.

It is with this basic assumption that faith and action are intrinsically united in the Christian witness that this article sets forth some approaches to residential segregation. These approaches are not new; they have been used by many individuals and groups in struggling for justice and equal opportunity in housing. They have been reported upon in the literature in the field as well as in popular magazines. However, this issue was prepared in the hope that some round-up of such approaches might be helpful to individuals and groups seeking to express their Christian concern. Four such approaches are discussed in this article.

### SUPPORTING LAWS AND GOVERNMENTAL ACTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING

To date, seven states and two cities have laws or ordinances barring discrimination in private housing. They are Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Pennsylvania; New York City and Pittsburgh. Three states — California, New Jersey and Washington — outlaw discrimination in that part of the private housing supply which benefits from FHA or VA mortgage guarantees. An additional four states and 33 cities have anti-discrimination laws or policy resolutions affecting some portion of the housing market such as public housing and government sponsored urban renewal developments. The National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, the foremost voluntary, non-profit organization in the field, in their March-April 1961 issue of *Trends* indicates that campaigns for fair housing laws or for measures to

strengthen existing statutes are still underway in Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Wisconsin and New York City.

These laws represent a trend toward the recognition of equality of opportunity in housing as a part of public policy. They also represent the concern and effort of many organizations including religious groups. With regard to the passage of anti-discrimination laws, the role of churches and church-related organizations has been primarily a supportive one. However, this support has been significant in the passage of such legislation and in the securing of administrative action.

Some people have doubts about the possibility of promoting racial equality by law. They assert that laws cannot change attitudes and social customs which are at the heart of the problem. They cite past failures of Federal and state laws. These former legislative failures certainly indicate that a mere passage of a law does not remedy a social condition; however, they do not justify a conclusion that law is of no importance.

Most experts on the subject stress that law can be a strong force for changing social habits and indirectly can modify attitudes. Anti-discrimination laws, even when they run counter to customary practice, are in line with the moral and political ideals held by most Americans. Thus, they may expect support for that reason. In addition, it is important to make clear the intent of the law. The law is not directed at changing attitudes but only at eliminating certain acts of discrimination. The recent findings in the field of social psychology indicate that the situation in which a person finds himself is a major determinant of his behavior; the significance of the law is that it can effect a change in the situation in which a person acts.

Moreover, the law, unlike voluntary approaches, does not make equal access to housing for the minority group member dependent on the goodwill of the majority, but can guarantee his equal right to participation in the general housing market. It also enables those who desire it to have a greater freedom to live out their convictions regarding equal opportunity for all.

What has been the experience with such laws? In the four states and two cities which have had laws concerning private housing, the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing indicates that they have been a potent educational force in modifying racial and religious discrimination in housing rather than a revolutionary force. The laws have provided a legal and ethical framework within which movement toward the resolution of the problem of discrimination in housing could take place. Most of the evaluations of the effectiveness of these laws indicate that more significant dispersals of minority groups have occurred in states and cities where the law created such a framework than in states and cities where there were no such laws.

If the law is an important approach, what about federal legislation in this area? The prospects for federal legislation are very dim. The basic strategy of the Kennedy Administration seems to be that of first of all working through executive action and persuasion.

However, an executive order barring discrimination in all Federal housing programs is a real possibility. In a press statement published on August 9, 1960, the present incumbent in the White House in the midst of the 1960 presidential campaign declared: "The Administration could now make a real political contribution to civil rights progress by issuing the Executive Order against discrimination in Federal housing programs which the Civil Rights Commission proposed eleven months ago. I renew my call on the President to issue such an



order. If he does not do it, a new Democratic Administration will." The 1960 Democratic Platform pledged: "The new Democratic Administration will take action to end discrimination in Federal housing programs, including Federally assisted housing." In addition, the Administration has taken forthright action including the issuance of Executive Order No. 10925 on March 6, 1961. This order combined the functions of two previously existing Presidential committees in a new program aimed at eliminating discrimination in employment in government agencies and by government contractors and subcontractors.

The basic issue faced by the Federal government was stated by the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights in its January 13, 1961 report when it declared: "It is not sound policy for the Federal Government to disburse public funds in such a manner that it increases the adverse effects on some citizens of denials of equal protection of the laws by States and political subdivisions thereof." The Southern Regional Council in the *Federal Executive and Civil Rights*, a report sent to the President, states the basic issue this way: "The question for the federal government to face is that of how it will direct the tremendous influence which it has through its huge involvement in the housing market. Will it use this influence as it has and as it still largely does, to strengthen and spread housing segregation?"

Most Protestant denominations and councils of churches have general pronouncements or resolutions concerning human rights and specific statements concerning non-discrimination in housing. Such policy statements would enable them or their constituent churches to support fair housing practice legislation on the national, state and local level. Two recent examples of such stands are cited:

In the early part of this year, the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. stated "... That the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., reflecting the basic principle enunciated, joins with other religious bodies and agencies in urging the President of the United States to issue an executive order directing federal agencies related in any way to housing to operate within their several functions in such a manner as to insure that all housing within the scope of their authority and purview reflect the letter and the spirit of the Fourteenth Amendment and related laws making housing equally available to all Americans regardless of race, color, or creed."

Another example of the churches' support of legislation took place in Indiana this winter. On February 12, 1961, a group of Indiana churches and church leaders made public their support of bills in the state legislature which sought to eliminate discriminatory practices based on race, creed or national origin. Dr. Grover L. Hartman, Executive Secretary of the Indiana Council of Churches, said that the march of the Negro citizens on the State House and the widespread observance of Race Relations Sunday in the churches occasioned the action. "With the State Senate now considering bills to eliminate discrimination in employment and in access to accommodations generally, we desire to make clear that these matters are not of concern for Negroes alone but for all citizens and Christians in particular."

Among those joining in the issuance of statements were representatives of the Indiana Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, the Indiana Area of the Methodist Church, the Association of Christian Churches in Indiana (Disciples of Christ), Indiana Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Middle District of Indiana Church of the Brethren.

According to Dr. Hartman fourteen Protestant denominations working together in the Indiana Council of Churches voted at their annual assembly, January 20, 1961 to seek removal of all barriers based on racial differences and elimination of discrimination in education, employment, housing and public accommodations.

The active support of legislation with adequate enforcement provisions on every governmental level by individual Christians and churches and councils of churches are crucial in the search for residential freedom for all citizens. The Commission on Race and Housing, an independent private organization financed by a grant from the Fund for the Republic, in its report said: "Only government and law can be directly effective on a large scale in reducing or eliminating discriminatory practices. However, it is in the American tradition that initiative, ideas, and

pressures for action should come largely from private citizens who interest themselves in the problem. Moreover, it is universal experience that governmental bodies seldom move on controversial issues without strong sustained pressure from organized citizen groups who play the role of advocate, goad and watchdog."

#### ADVERTISING GOOD-WILL THROUGH OPEN OCCUPANCY PLEDGE COVENANTS

On February 22, 1961 both the *Syracuse Herald-Journal* and the *Post Journal* carried a full-page ad with the names of 3,400 persons in Onondaga County who actively pledged themselves to support the principle of equal housing opportunities for all persons regardless of color, creed or national origin. This Open Occupancy Pledge was sponsored by the Syracuse Interfaith Committee on Open Occupancy. The pledge read: "We the undersigned,

"BELIEVE that every person has the moral and legal right to rent, buy or build a home anywhere without restrictions which are based upon race, religion or national origin;

"BELIEVE it to be in the best interest of our Syracuse metropolitan area that all persons of goodwill take an active role in bringing about this freedom of opportunity in housing;

"We will welcome the purchase or rental of houses in our neighborhoods by any law-abiding and responsible person of whatever race, religion, or national origin; and will work with him to build, to improve, and to maintain a community which is good for all."

Underneath this pledge were printed statements of endorsement and a call to support the principle of open occupancy by the Board of Directors of the Syracuse Area Council of Churches, Walter A. Foery, Catholic Bishop of Syracuse and the Rabbinical Council of Syracuse.

Similar ads have appeared as paid advertising in an increasing number of newspapers across the country. They usually carry a covenant, a welcome statement or a credo plus signatures of hundreds of local citizens affirming support of open occupancy. It has become a standard approach in programs of action to secure equal opportunity in housing.

Such programs have been carried on in many communities including many towns in the metropolitan area of San Francisco and Garden Grove and Pasadena, California; Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut; Des Moines, Iowa; Champaign-Urbana, Illinois; Pittsfield, Massachusetts; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Lincoln, Nebraska; Princeton and Webster, New Jersey; Brooklyn, Syracuse, Rockland County, New York; Portland, Oregon; Cleveland, Ohio. In some of these communities, these covenants, welcome statements or credos are used as a basis for launching programs of education and of bringing together buyers and sellers who are committed to the principle of open occupancy.

Similar kinds of projects are being carried on presently in a number of other communities including Huntington, New York; Seattle, Washington; Bergen County, New Jersey; and Washington, D. C. In many cities, statements by church leaders have been published. This has occurred in communities such as West Seattle, Washington; Dayton, Ohio; Rochester and Syracuse, New York; Lower Bucks County and Erie, Pennsylvania; and Detroit, Michigan.

Open occupancy pledge campaigns have arisen spontaneously in local communities. In some cities, the initiative has come from a local church or council of churches. In other places, an individual or a group have provided the spark. However, in most cases, very quickly they have become community-wide projects involving the direct or indirect support of the three major faiths as well as other major civic organizations.

An outstanding example of the participation of Protestant churches and councils of churches in using this approach has occurred in the metropolitan area of San Francisco. At a session of the Division of Christian Life and Work at the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in December 1960, Robert Wesley Brown, a Christian layman, presented an Honor Roll of churches in Northern California who had participated in open occupancy pledge campaigns. Over sixty local churches of different denominations in the San Francisco Bay area were so honored. On that occasion, Mr. Brown said: "Recognition of such activity, involving as it does laymen and



laywomen fully as such as it does pastors, is in keeping with the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers . . ."

In presenting this Honor Roll Mr. Brown sketched briefly the history of the accomplishments of open occupancy covenant campaigns in Northern California. The concern of churchmen and churches was given impetus in the latter part of 1957 by a visit of a staff member of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations of the National Council of Churches in a meeting with the Santa Clara Council of Churches. At this meeting, the concern of churches and churchmen about discrimination in housing was fused with the open occupancy covenant campaign approach.

The campaign was publicly announced on Race Relations Sunday 1958. Two groups initially spearheaded this pioneering endeavor: The Palo Alto Area Committee on Open Housing, which included churches from Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties and the Race Relations Committee of the Santa Clara County Council of Churches with activities centering in San Jose. Working together, these two groups adopted the same covenant which read in part: "I hereby witness that I am ready to welcome into my neighborhood residents of whatever race, creed, or national origin."

Mr. Brown continued, "The Palo Alto Area Committee on Open Housing published the names of more than 1,500 signers on May 10, 1958 in the Palo Alto Times; the Santa Clara County Council of Churches published the names of more than 2,000 signers in the San Jose papers on September 26, 1959. In 1960, the Redwood City Congregational church, the Albany-Berkeley Council of Churches, the Marin County Committee for Fair Housing and the Peninsula Council of Churches published the names of signers which they have obtained bringing the total to about eight thousand names." In 1961, the Contra Costa County Council reported an ad with 2,200 names.

Mr. Brown indicated that this action program had the following values: 1. helped to mold public opinion toward acceptance of open occupancy; 2. aided in the development of other approaches, such as listing services for bringing buyer and seller together or cooperation with such services where they already existed; 3. developed a resource file of persons who would be available for help if tension were to develop in a community when non-white persons moved into a previously all-white area; 4. strengthened the conviction and understanding of those who participated in such a program of action.

What has been the value of these campaigns? Since most of these campaigns have had good coverage in the press and other mass communication media, they have helped to alert the members of a community to the problems faced by non-white citizens in procuring housing on a non-discriminatory basis.

Moreover, in many cases, continuing organizations have evolved to work for an open housing market. Most leaders have been surprised at the support for open occupancy housing. For example, a recent letter to the Department reported that one community had planned on obtaining 1,000 signatures; they obtained well over 2,000.

In addition, these campaigns have had an impact on the total community climate within which this problem of discrimination in housing must be resolved. One of the classic arguments used by realtors and private sellers has been that white home-owners will not accept families of another color as neighbors. Open occupancy pledge campaigns have indicated the readiness of many Americans to practice the principles of democracy.

#### NON-DISCRIMINATORY LISTING SERVICE

Most of the sales of older housing are handled by brokers licensed under the laws of their states. Many of these brokers have followed a policy and practice of excluding persons of certain racial and religious groups from specific residential areas. In this situation, the home-owner in an all-white residential area who wishes to make his property available without discrimination faces a problem along with the minority group person who may be desirous of such housing. In addition, a white purchaser who wishes to buy in a changing neighborhood encounters reluctance on the part of many brokers. With rare exceptions, real estate brokers will handle the sale or rental of property to minority persons only in those areas which are regarded as appropriate by the brokers.

In a number of cities, where citizen groups have failed in their attempts to change the policy and practice of real estate brokers, they have organized themselves to facilitate direct buyer and seller communications on a non-discriminatory basis. Such services have been variously designated as "Listing Service", "Clearing House", "Introduction Service", "House Registry", "Fair Housing Committee", etc.

Listing services have sprung up in a number of cities including Berkeley, Palo Alto, San Francisco and San Jose, California; Oak Park and Champaign-Urbana, Illinois; Des Moines, Iowa; Boston, Massachusetts; Princeton, Riverton and Bergen County, New Jersey; Huntington, Great Neck, Ossining, New York City, Scarsdale, Rochester, and White Plains, New York; Cleveland, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Washington, D. C.

Most of them are clustered within metropolitan areas. Four especially interesting developments are: 1. the joining together of 22 organizations in the metropolitan San Francisco area in forming the Bay City Area Committee on Housing to promote equal opportunity; 2. the working of the Community Relations Committee of the American Friends Service Committee in Cambridge, Massachusetts as a clearing house for twenty-four fair housing committees located in suburban communities in Metropolitan Boston; 3. establishment of the Friends Suburban Housing, Inc., a licensed commercial real estate brokerage firm, to offer housing on a non-discriminatory basis in Metropolitan Philadelphia. (This is probably the only commercial real estate firm in the nation organized exclusively for the purpose of achieving integration.) 4. establishment of the Greater Minneapolis Interfaith Fair Housing Program in 1959 as a social action experiment. This project is sponsored by the United Church of Christ and by churches, synagogues, foundations and individuals in Minneapolis. Its program is designed to a) test methods by which changes can be brought about in the behavior patterns of the majority group; b) develop action experiments to accelerate the process of desegregation of housing in the United States and c) implement the resolutions of the churches on open occupancy on the local level.

In some cities, a paid executive has been hired to direct the program. However, in most of them, they are manned by volunteers with some paid secretarial help. In many cases, religious and religiously-related organizations have furnished a great deal of the support.

The general pattern of operation has been to build both a listing of non-white families desirous of purchasing homes and a listing of whites who wish to sell their homes. Then, an attempt is made to bring together a willing seller and a willing buyer. It is important to stress that none of these voluntary groups function as brokers. They charge no fee for their introductory service. Some of them, where possible, use the services of a licensed broker. In many cases the sales are closed with the assistance of a lawyer.

Techniques used in locating sale or rental properties have included: 1. personal contacts developed by committee members and their friends; 2. contacts made of persons who have signed open occupancy pledges; 3. follow-up of classified ads; and 4. insertion of their own ad requesting non-discriminatory listings.

To secure willing buyers, committees have 1. developed contacts through members and friends on the committee; 2. advertised the service by brochures, notices in the bulletins of churches and civic organizations, speakers at meetings, etc.; 3. used classified ads; and 4. received referrals from churches and civic organizations.

In addition to their listing service, these groups carry on a continuous educational program in the community in order to create a greater acceptance of the principle and practice of open occupancy. Moreover, they have aided the minority group family in its adjustment into previously all-white communities where such help was needed.

Some of the problems which these committees have encountered have been 1. the difficulty experienced by minority group members in getting mortgages for the purchase of housing. 2. the difficulty of obtaining sufficient numbers of buyers and also of meeting the particular housing needs of such buyers from their list; and 3. the difficulty of getting the co-



operation of licensed brokers to offer sales on a non-discriminatory basis.

Some of the values of this approach are 1. it can be carried on by a group of concerned citizens within their resources in terms of time and money; 2. it aids in the dispersion of minority groups by opening up previously restricted areas; and 3. it adds to the creation of a climate within which a solution to the problem of residential segregation can be sought.

#### THE NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION PROGRAM

Some years ago a neighborhood group in the Springfield Gardens section of Queens, New York, attracted national attention when it developed a program to stop the "block-busting" tactics of unscrupulous real estate agents. Rumors, panic selling and an outburst of vandalism caused the Tri-Community Council, a leadership group of organizations and individuals in the area, to call upon the Commission on Intergroup Relations of New York City for consultation. Through this consultation, block meetings were developed to counteract false reports. A Neighborhood Relations Committee was set up. Soon, at least forty homes owned by whites displayed signs reading: "Not for sale. We believe in Democracy."

Many other white and predominantly all-white neighborhoods are proving through their behavior that the advent of people of another race does not have to mean rapid social change, the decline of occupancy and neighborhood standards and a drop in real estate values. Such neighborhood stabilization projects can be found in areas of Baltimore; Chicago; New York; Philadelphia; Washington, D. C.; Teaneck, New Jersey; New Haven, Connecticut and in many other neighborhoods throughout the North.

Most of these community groups have been started through the concern of an individual or individuals who have then contacted other neighbors and community organizations. In many cases, they have then turned to an agency with experience in intergroup relations for help in developing a program.

All of them have similar general objectives: 1. to persuade present residents to accept any new neighbors of another race on the same basis they would accept any other new neighbor; 2. to discourage panic selling; 3. to promote good maintenance standards; and 4. to build healthy community morale and relationships.

A well-organized program might include: 1. a survey of what is actually happening in the community; 2. informal discussions and educational meetings in homes; 3. distribution of literature, dispelling the myths about neighborhood deterioration and the decline of property values when people of another race move in, as well as relating the experiences of other communities; 4. development of literature stressing the advantages of the present neighborhood and the high cost of moving; 5. organization of committees (a) to seek the cooperation of real estate brokers, individuals and groups who are attempting to spread fear; (b) to see that neighborhood maintenance standards and zoning regulations are enforced, especially with regard to occupancy and illegal conversions; (c) to enlist the support of religious and civic leaders and their organizations; (d) to work on areas of general community improvement such as

schools, street lighting, recreational facilities, etc.; and (e) to attempt to enlist the cooperation of realtors and others to attract white residents to the neighborhood.

What has been and is the value of neighborhood stabilization projects? They stop panic-selling, prevent potential violence and help to maintain property values. Most experts agree that their chief limitation derives from their concentration in a single neighborhood. As long as surrounding neighborhoods remain restricted, the pressure of meeting housing needs of people of racial minority groups will be focused on a changing neighborhood. However, this approach is a valuable one in preventing widespread anguish, displacement and financial loss. In addition, it provides a partial solution and contributes to the climate for the development of equal opportunity in housing.

#### CONCLUSION

These approaches are simply suggestive. No one approach will solve the problems. These and other approaches not mentioned are all needed.

However, one basic foundation for all approaches is the need to collect and make available the facts concerning housing conditions of people belonging to racial minority groups, discriminatory housing practices and their effects, experiences with open occupancy housing including its effect on the housing market and property values, experiences with laws against discrimination, public opinion regarding equal opportunity for housing, the changing economic and social status of racial minority group members, urban renewal and redevelopment plans and other relevant facts which bear on the situation.

Moreover, because there are areas of special knowledge and skills involved in such fields as real estate, mortgage financing, law and community organization, it is important that groups concerned about working to eliminate discrimination in housing consult with intergroup relation agencies as well as with persons who have special competence in the field of housing.

Whether or not they desire it, Christians and the churches will be increasingly tested by the issue of residential desegregation. Can the churches make their witness loud and clear? The answer to this confrontation in any event will be made by individual Christians and churches across the nation. The responses they make will have a far-reaching impact on their own life and on the cultural norms and social structure of American society.

Individuals or groups desiring information concerning these approaches can contact the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N. Y.

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The matter in these pages is presented for the reader's information. Unless so stated, it is not to be construed as reflecting the attitudes or positions of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations or of The National Council of Churches.

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